

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 11197

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANESE RIGHT, LEFT AND CENTER DEFINE THEIR POSITIONS

REF: BEIRUT 10330

SUMMARY: THE RIGHTIST PHALANGE PARTY, KAMAL JUMBLATT'S LEFTIST "PROGRESSIVE FORCES," AND THE MODERATE LEADERS OF THE CHRITISN- MOSLEM "DIALOGUE" (REPORTED REFTEL) ALL ISSUED MAJOR STATEMENTS ON SOCIAL AND POLITICAL QUESTIONS DURING THE LAST HALF OF AUGUST. THE PHALANGE PLATFORM WAS GENERAL IN CONTENT AND SOMEWHAT CONCILIATORY IN TONE, EXCEPT ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES THAT ARE MOST SENSITIVE FOR CHRISTIANS. THE LEFT'S PROGRAM WAS MORE SPECIFIC AND MILITANT; IT STRESSED POLITICAL REFORMS ABOVE ALL ELSE. THE "DIALOGUE" GROUP'S REPORT DISPLAYED DISAGREEMENT ON KEY

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QUESTIONS. REACTIONS TO ALL THESE DECLARATIONS WERE

LIKEWARM, AND THE ERUPTION OF CIVIL STRIFE AT ZAHLE AT THE END OF AUGUST IMMEDIATELY PUT THESE SOMEWHAT ABSTRACT QUESTIONS ON THE BACK BURNER. NEVERTHELESS, THE DEBATE REFLECTS LONG-TERM ISSUES AND WILL CERTAINLY RE-EMERGE ONCE STABILITY IS RESTORED. THE AUGUST DECLARATIONS ARE SEEN AS PART OF A CONTINUING JOCKEYING PROCESS, AS LEBANON'S POLITICAL FORCES SEEK A CONSENSUS ON BASIC CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTIONS, SO FAR IN VAIN. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING THE LATTER HALF OF AUGUST, JUST PRIOR TO THE ZAHLE MINI-ROUND, PUBLIC STATEMENTS CAME FROM LEADING GROUPS OF THE RIGHT, LEFT, AND CENTER SEEKING TO DEFINE THEIR POSITIONS ON LEBANON'S FUTURE. THESE DECLARATIONS WERE FOCAL POINTS IN A LIVELY DEBATE OVER SOCIAL AND POLITICAL REFORMS, A DEBATE LIKELY TO RESUME ONCE SECURITY IS ESTABLISHED AGAIN.

I. RIGHT: PHALANGE PROGRAM

2. FOLLOWING A THREE-DAY MEETING, THE CHRISTIAN RIGHTIST PHALANGE PARTY ISSUED A STATEMENT OF GENERAL PRINCIPLES AUG 17 THAT SHOWED A SURPRISING MODERATION WHILE REAFFIRMING THE BASIC PHALANGE POSITION. THE STATEMENT INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING:

(A) THE PARTY AFFIRMED ITS "DETERMINATION NOT TO BE DRAGGED INTO CIVIL STRIFE."

(B) THE STATE SHOULD "SHOULDN'T ITS RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE SPHERE OF SECURITY WITH GREATER FIRMNESS, SO THAT IT MAY REGAIN ITS PRESTIGE AND RESTORE CONFIDENCE TO THE PEOPLE."

(C) THE GOVT SHOULD TAKE ACTION IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL JUSTICE "SO THAT NO REGIONS WOULD REMAIN BACKWARD AND NO CITIZENS DEPRIVED."

(D) THE PHALANGE REITERATED ITS BACKING OF THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE AND TERMED THE PLO THE "SOLE AND LEGITIMATE REP OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE." THE PARTY CALLED ON THE PLO TO HONOR ITS AGREEMENTS WITH THE LEBANESE STATE AND "NOT TO ALLOW ITSELF TO BE USED" BY DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN ELEMENTS (UNNAMED) BENT ON DESTROYING LEBANON'S DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM.

(E) THE STATEMENT CONTAINED NO SPECIFIC DEFENSE OF THE CONSTITUTION OR THE "NATIONAL PACT," BUT IT MADE THE PARTY'S AVERSION TO BASIC CHANGES IN THEM CLEAR BY PRAISING LEBANON'S "UNIQUE AND MODEL FORMULA."

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3. APROPOS OF POINT (A) ABOVE, A PHALANGE LEADER DECLARED TO EMBOFF IN SEPARATE CONVERSATIONS AUG 22 AND SEPT 4 THAT THE PARTY'S PROFESSED POLICY WAS TO AVOID CIVIL CLASHES, BUT THAT IT ALWAYS STOOD READY TO FIGHT BACK. HE CLAIMED THE PARTY HAD STAYED OUT OF THE ZAHLE STRIFE. (COMMENT THIS MAY BE TRUE AS OFFICIAL PHALANGE POLICY, BUT INVOLVEMENT BY PARTY MEMBERS UNDOUBTEDLY OCCURRED.) AS FOR

POINT (C) ABOVE, THIS SOURCE CONFIRMED THAT THE PARTY WOULD COMMIT ITSELF TO SOCIAL REFORM. HE STRESSED AMONG OTHER THINGS THE SQUEEZING OF THE MIDDLE CLASS THAT HAS OCCURRED FROM INFLATION AND FROM THE STRIFE-RELATED ECONOMIC DISLOCATIONS. AS FOR THE PHALANGE VIEW OF THE FEDAYEEN, HE BELIEVED NOTHING COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED IN THIS DOMAIN WITHOUT HELP FROM THE ARAB STATES, WHICH HE DIDN'T FORESEE; ONE MUST JUST HOPE THIS ISSUE WILL LIE DORMANT, HE SUGGESTED. BUT IF THERE'S A FULL-FLEDGED FOURTH ROUND, HE ADDED DARKLY, THE PHALANGE HAS PLANS TO OCCUPY ONE OR MORE OF THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS. ON THE "NATIONAL PACT" THIS SOURCE SAID MERELY THAT THE MOSLEMS SHOULD COME UP WITH SOME GOOD IDEAS IF THEY FEEL AGGRIEVED, BUT THEY MUST REALIZE THE CHRISTIANS HAVE GRIEVANCES TOO.

II. LEFT: PLATFORM OF JUMBLATT'S "NATIONALIST AND PROGRESSIVE FORCES"

4. LEFTIST DRUZE LEADER KAMAL JUMBLATT ANNOUNCED A COMPREHENSIVE REFORM PROGRAM AUG 18 AT THE CLOSE OF A MEETING OF "PROGRESSIVE" GROUPS. MORE DETAILED THAN THE PHALANGE PLATFORM PUBLISHED THE DAY BEFORE AND CONSIDERABLY MORE UNCOMPRISING, IT CONTAINED THE FOLLOWING MAIN IDEAS (SEE FBIS AMMAN 181457Z FOR DETAILS):

(A) CONFESSIONALISM MUST BE ABOLISHED IN POLITICS, FOR ITS PERPETUATION HINDERS SOCIAL PROGRESS. THE ULTIMATE AIM MUST BE THE "TOTAL SECULARIZATION OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM"

(B) ALL LEBANON SHOULD BE A SINGLE CONSTITUENCY IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, WITH EACH 10,000 VOTERS SELECTING A DEPUTY UNDER A PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION PLAN. FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATION THERE SHOULD BE TEN GOVERNORATES INSTEAD OF FIVE. THE JUDICIARY SHOULD BE COMPLETELY INDEPENDENT AND REORGANIZED.

(C) A SECOND PARLIAMENTARY HOUSE SHOULD BE SET UP, BUT WITH LIMITED POWERS. IT SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THE ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT.

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(D) THE POWERS OF THE PRESIDENT OVER THE CABINET SHOULD BE REDUCED IN SEVERAL SPECIFIED WAYS.

(E) THE ARMY SHOULD BE REORGANIZED AND ITS FUNCTION CONFINED TO "DEFENDING LEBANON'S BORDER AND NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE"

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USINT BAGHDAD

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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

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AND ALSO TO "SHOULDERING ITS PAN-ARAB RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE AND ARAB CAUSES." IT SHOULD BE TOTALLY SUBJECT TO CIVIL AUTHORITY AND MADE NON-CONFESSIONAL IN CHARACTER. THE POWERS OF THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SHOULD BE LIMITED. THERE SHOULD BE A SUPREME DEFENSE COUNCIL UNDER THE PRESIDENT FOR POLICY AND A COMMAND COUNCIL OF HIGH OFFICERS FOR INTERNAL CONTROL.

5. JUMBLATT REAFFIRMED SOME OF THE ABOVE PRINCIPLES IN ANOTHER STATEMENT AUG 25. AS REPORTED LATER IN THE PRESS, HIS REMARKS STRESSED THAT LEBANON WOULD SEE VIOLENCE IF THERE WERE NO CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES. HE ALSO HIT HARD ON THE THEME THAT THE PRESIDENT'S POWERS SHOULD BE LIMITED AND THOSE OF THE PRIME MINISTER RELATIVELY ENHANCED.

III. CENTER: REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN-MOSLEM "DIALOGUE"
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6. AS REPORTED REFTTEL, ONE OF THE MAIN SHOWCASES OF MODERATION AFTER THE THIRD ROUND WAS A SERIES OF MEETINGS BETWEEN MOSLEM AND CHRISTIAN LEADERS TO SEEK COMMON GROUND ON LEBANON'S FUTURE. THIS "DIALOGUE" GROUP PUBLISHED A COMMUN-

IQUE AUG 19 OUTLINING ITS PROGRESS--OR, AS THINGS TURNED OUT, LACK OF PROGRESS. ITEMS IN THE COMMUNIQUE:

(A) THERE WAS "TOTAL AGREEMENT ON THE NECESSITY OF INTRODUCING POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL REFORMS WITH THE AIM OF ENSURING JUSTICE TO ALL FACTIONS, ENSURING BALANCE WITHIN THE GOVT AND INSTITUTIONS, AND SPREADING PROSPERITY IN ALL SECTORS AND REGIONS." HOWEVER, THE TATEMENT EXPLICITLY NOTED DISAGREEMENT OVER THE NATURE OF SUCH REFORMS, SAYING THAT SOME PARTICIPANTS FAVORED AN IMMEDIATE AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION TO LIQUIDATE POLITICAL CONFESSIONALISM, WHILE OTHERS BELIEVED THAT THE ABOLITION OF CONFESSIONALISM SHOULD BE DEFERRED UNTIL A NATIONAL CONSENSUS IS ACHIEVED ON AN ALTERNATIVE FORMULA.

(B) THE PARTICIPANTS AGREED THAT THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION LAW SHOULD BE AMENDED AS A WAY OF "CONSOLIDATING NATIONAL UNITY." THERE WAS ALSO AGREEMENT THAT THE LEBANESE ARMY SHOULD BE STRENGTHENED AND REORGANIZED; THOUGH NO SPECIFIC IDEAS WERE GIVEN, THE PRINCIPLE WAS STATED THAT "ALL ARMS ARE FOR THE NATION."

(C) THE GROUP AGREED THAT LEBANON "AS A FREE AND SOVEREIGN ARAB STATE" SHOULD DEFEND THE "PALESTINIAN CAUSE." INSPIRED BY THE SPIRIT OF THE AGREEMENTS CONCLUDED WITH THE FEDAYEEN, THE LEBANESE GOVT SHOULD EXERCISE AUTHORITY OVER ALL PERSONS RESIDING IN LEBANON AND OVER ALL LEBANESE SOIL.

7. IN SEPARATE CONVERSATIONS WITH A LEADING MOSLEM AND A LEADING CHRISTIAN PARTICIPANT IN THE "DIALOGUE" AUG 13 AND 20, EMBOFF GOT CONFIRMATION THAT THE CONFESSIONAL BASIS OF THE "NATIONAL PACT" HAD BEEN A MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCK. SOCIAL REFORM HAD BEEN FAR LESS A SORE POINT. THE MOSLEM PARTICIPANT CONSIDERED CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE A NECESSARY ACCOMPANIMENT TO SOCIAL REFORM, AND HE ROUNDLY CRITICIZED CONFESSIONALISM IN GOVT AS ANACHRONISTIC. THE CHRISTIAN, A MARONITE, DEFENDED THE TRADITION OF A MARONITE PRESIDENT ON THE THEORY
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THAT A SUNNI PRESIDENT WOULD BE INCLINED TO SACRIFICE LEBANON'S INDEPENDENCE FOR ARAB CAUSES. BOTH INDICATED, HOWEVER, THAT GRADUALISM IN CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES WAS ACCEPTABLE AS A GUIDING PRINCIPLE TO MOST PARTICIPANTS.

8. THERE WERE FURTHER "DIALOGUES" AFTER THE COMMUNIQUE, BUT UNDER NEW SPONSORSHIP AND WITH DIFFERENT BUT OVERLAPPING PARTICIPATION. VARIOUS PROMINENT PERSONALITIES WERE INVITED TO PRESENT THEIR VIEWS AT PUBLIC MEETINGS. THE AUG 25 REMARKS OF JUMBLATT REPORTED ABOVE CAME AT THE FIRST OF THESE MEETINGS. THE ORIGINAL "DIALOGUE" GROUP HAS NOT YET RESUMED TALKS, BUT IT HAS NOT FORMALLY DISBANDED.

IV. REACTIONS LUKEWARM

9. REACTIONS IN BEIRUT TO ALL THE ABOVE DECLARATIONS WERE MUTED. THESE STATEMENTS WERE WIDELY SEEN AS MANEUVERS IN A CONTINUING JOCKEYING PROCESS LEADING EVENTUALLY TO A "LEBANESE SOLUTION," HOPEFULLY OF THE NON-VIOLENT VARIETY. A MODERATE MARONITE DEPUTY TOLD AN EMBOFF AUG 26, FOR WX-AMPLE, THAT HE CONSIDERED THE PHALANGE POSITION TO BE FLEXIBLE EVEN ON CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES. THIS DEPUTY SAW A NEED FOR CHANGE IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AND, AS A FIRST STEP, REFORM OF THE ARMY. ALTHOUGH DISDAINFUL OF THE PRESENT NATIONAL LEADERSHIP BOTH CHRISTIAN AND MOSLEM, HE WAS FARLY HOPEFUL THAT SUCH CHANGES WOULD OCCUR IN TIME.

10. PRES FRANGIE TOOK A HESITANT STEP TOWARD POLITICAL REFORM IN A SPEECH AUG 23. HE SAID THE CONSTITUTION WAS NOT IMMUTABLE AND THAT THE "NATIONAL PACT" WOULD "DEVELOP," ALTHOUGH HE TOOK PAINS TO PRAISE THE PACT AS A "FRATERNAL AND HONORABLE FORMULA OF COEXISTENCE IMPOSED BY THE REQUIREMENTS OF INDEPENDENCE." FRANGIE'S REMARKS PROVOKED A COUNTERATTACK FROM PHALANGE LEADER PIERRE GEMAYEL, WHO WARNED IN AN AUG 25 DECLARATION THAT TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION OR THE NATIONAL PACT NOW WOULD BE "TO PLAY WITH FIRE." HOWEVER, HE CONCEDED THE CONSTITUTION WAS NOT A "HOLY TEXT."

11. THE SPARSE PROGRESS REVEALED IN THE COMMUNIQUE OF THE MOSLEM-CHRISTIAN "DIALOGUE" CAUSED PERHAPS THE MOST PERVASIVE REACTION, NAMELY A GENERAL FEELING OF LETDOWN ABOUT CONFIDENTIAL

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THIS MODERATE GROUP. EVEN EX-PRES CHARLES HELOU, WHO WAS INVOLVED AS MUCH AS ANYONE IN ORGANIZING THE MEETINGS, WAS DESCRIBED BY A CLOSE RELATIVE AS "DISAPPOINTED." THE SOLE ACCOMPLISHMENT SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN THAT THE TALKS FOCUSED ATTENTION ON THE NEED FOR MODERATION DURING THE DICEY WEEKS JUST AFTER THE FIGHTING--AND ALSO, PERHAPS, THAT NATIONAL LEADERS NOW SEE MORE CLEARLY WHERE THEY AGREE AND DISAGREE.

V. COMMENTS:

12. WHAT COMES THROUGH MOST IN THE ABOVE TRIO OF PLATFORMS IS THE INABILITY OF THE CENTER TO CONTRIBUTE AS FORCEFULLY AS THE TWO EXTREMES. REFLECTING THE DISAGREEMENTS OF THE EXTREMES, THE CENTER SEES ITS WAY CLEAR TO AGREEMENT ONLY ON SOCIAL REFORM AND A FEW OTHER MATTERS SUCH AS ARMY REFORM. IF THE CENTER CAN EVENTUALLY FORGE A CONSENSUS ON THE SENSITIVE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES, WE MAY AT LAST COME OUT OF THE WOODS IN THE POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THIS CRISIS. MEANWHILE, THE CENTER'S SOLE CONTRIBUTION IS TO CREATE A FORM FOR DISCUSSION,

A USEFUL AND EVEN ESSENTIAL TASK BUT HARDLY ENOUGH TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM.

13. NOTHING REVEALED THE SHORT-TERM INEFFECTUALITY OF THIS DEBATE MORE THAN THE BLOW-UP AT ZAHLE AT THE END OF AUG, WHICH WAS FOLLOWED IMMEDIATELY BY TROUBLES IN TRIPOLI AND BEIRUT. FACED AGAIN WITH A PRESSING CRISIS, THE GOVERNMENT AND THE POLITICIANS FOCUSED ON THE SECURITY ISSUE. BUT THE UNDERLYING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL QUESTIONS BROUGHT UP IN THE ABOVE PRONOUNCEMENTS FROM RIGHT, LEFT, AND CENTER ARE AS MUCH A PART OF THE LONG-TERM PROBLEM AS THE MAINTENANCE OF STABILITY. WE CAN EXPECT THE DEBATE TO CONTINUE.
GODLEY

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